A

SERMON

Preached before the

King & Queen

AT

WHITE-HALL,

March the Twelfth, 16^{89}_{90}.

BEING

The Faſt-Day.

By the Biſhop of St. *Aſaph*, Lord Almoner to THEIR MAJESTIES.

Publiſhed by Their Majeſties Command.

LONDON, Printed for *Robert Clavell* at the *Peacock* in St. *Paul's* Church-yard. 1690.

THE
BISHOP of St. *ASAPH*'s SERMON
Before the
KING and QUEEN
ON THE
FAST-DAY.

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A

II Peter III. 9.

For the Lord is not ſlack concerning his Promiſe, (as ſome Men count ſlackneſs) but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to Repentance.

THE Word *concerning his Promiſe*, refers to that which went before in the fourth Verſe of this Chapter: where it is plain that the Apoſtle ſpeaks of Chriſt's Promiſe of his coming to Judgment: that is indeed a Promiſe to his Elect, but is rather a Threatning to others; and therefore I ſhall rather call it a Prediction, which is a Word between both.

By Chriſt's Promiſe or Prediction, I ſuppoſe he means that in *Matthew* 24. where our Saviour foretells in one and the ſame Prophecy, both his coming to deſtroy *Jeruſalem*, and his coming to judge the World.

It is the delay of this laſt coming of Chriſt, againſt which the Apoſtle foreſaw that there would be an Objection, by *Scoffers* in the latter days. I ſhall not conſider all the Anſwer that he gave them, nor any more than what lies before us in my Text; nor even that, with relation only to the Day of Judgment, but as it extends to all the Judg-

ments of God; especially those that end in Destruction, as the Day of Judgment doth. Of this, and all other such Judgments, saith the Apostle, *For the Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, (as some men count slackness) but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.*

In my Discourse upon these Words, I shall proceed by these Steps and Degrees.

First, I take it for granted on all Hands, That God is generally very slow in inflicting his Judgments. It is that which the Scoffers object; it is granted by the Apostle in his Answer: They agree in the Thing, they differ concerning the Reason of it.

Therefore, Secondly, for the Reason, as these Scoffers would persuade themselves, it proceeds from God's slackness in his Government. But this the Apostle denies, that there can be any such thing in God. What then should be the Cause of God's delaying his Judgments? This is that which we are chiefly to consider.

The true Cause (saith the Apostle) is, the *Long-suffering* of God: Of which, among many Reasons that might be given, he gives this for a Principal; it is from his Infinite Goodness. It is his willingness by this means to save those whom a quicker way of Proceeding would destroy.

For

For the uſe of all this, I am to ſhew;

Firſt, How much we are wanting to our ſelves, if we are not ready to comply with his Goodneſs, if we are not willing to be ſaved, as well as God is willing to ſave us.

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew how much it concerns us to take that which is the only way to be ſaved, that is, by a ſpeedy and effectual Repentance.

Laſtly, For our Encouragement, I ſhall ſhew what Aſſurance we have, not only of Deliverance, but of further Favours upon our Repentance, from that God who ſo earneſtly deſires it, that he ſeems to expoſe his own Glory, he ſuffers wicked Men to call his Truth and Juſtice in queſtion, rather than not give time, and not uſe the utmoſt Means to ſave them from periſhing in their Sins.

In the Deſign here propoſed, I am to begin with that which is granted on all hands; That God is generally very ſlow in inflicting his Puniſhments upon Sinners. I do not ſay, he is always ſo; for ſometimes, nay oftentimes God doth otherwiſe, he takes Sinners in the Fact, and doth Execution upon the Place.

I need not mind you of the dreadful Examples in Scripture, of *Corah*, *Dathan*, and *Abiram*, of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, and the like. We have oftentimes the Terror of ſuch Examples before our Eyes. To ſee one killed in a drunken Quarrel, or in attempt-

ing a Robbery, or in ranging to ſatisfie his Luſt; to ſee a Sinner cut off in the firſt Act, or the firſt diſcover'd Act of his Sin: when this happens to any one, tho' we are ſilent as to his Eternal Eſtate, yet we cannot but ſay, there is a viſible Judgment of God, by which ſuch a one is taken away, *ſuddenly, as by a whirlwind, in his wrath.*

And yet we cannot ſay, that he is a greater Sinner, than they are who have their Lives prolong'd in their Wickedneſs: Nay, of the two, perhaps there is cauſe to fear their Condition much more than the other. For thus much the Apoſtle ſeems to imply, when he admits there is that that looks like ſlackneſs in Judgment: for there could be no ſuch Pretence, if the *moſt* or *greateſt* Sinners were judged, and eſpecially if they were judged *early* in this Life. The Apoſtle rather ſeems to admit of the contrary; and it ſufficiently appears, by many Inſtances, that the greateſt Sinners have had a long time given them before they have been called to account for their Sins againſt God.

If any would ſee this proved by Examples, let him think of the worſt Men mentioned in Scripture; he ſhall ſee how ſlow God hath been in bringing them to due Puniſhment.

Of Heathen Princes, there is none that hath a worſe Character upon him, than *Pharaoh*, a Monſter of Pride and Cruelty, and Contempt of God; which

which brought down upon him all the Plagues of *Ægypt*, ſo famous in Hiſtory. By the laſt of thoſe Judgments he periſht: but then it was long firſt; for all thoſe Plagues came upon him in one Year; and it was in the Sixteenth Year of his Reign, ſaith *Euſebius* from *Manetho* the *Ægyptian*.

Among the Jewiſh Kings, the worſt ſhould be wicked *Ahab*; for of him the Scripture ſaith, *There was none like him, that had ſold himſelf to work wickedneſs*; and yet *Ahab* reigned above Two and twenty Years, before the Dogs had the licking of his Blood.

In the New Teſtament, the worſt Great Men we read of were, that *Herod* that would have killed *Chriſt* in his Infancy, and *Pilate* by whom he was crucified: But of them, *Herod* came to his end (which indeed was very horrible, as *Joſephus* deſcribes it) not till the Four and thirtieth Year of his Reign. And *Pilate* the *Roman* Governor, whom the ſame *Joſephus* deſcribes as a Man made up of Avarice and Cruelty, yet continued in his Government, and ſeem'd to enjoy himſelf in thoſe Sins, for ſome Years after the Crucifying of our Saviour.

This forbearance of Perſons, even the worſt that ever liv'd, is not ſo ſtrange, or would be leſs ſtrange to us, if we conſider'd, that Men have another Life; and if they ſhould go quite unpuniſht here, as many do all their Lives, God knows where to find

find them at laſt: and then he can and will do them Juſtice; they ſhall pay both Principal and Intereſt together, in their Sufferings in the future Life.

But for Nations, they have no other Life but this: Their Sins muſt be puniſht here, or not at all. And therefore it may ſeem a little ſtrange that they ſhould have any forbearance: and yet ſo it is, that God is not in haſte even with Them.

For Examples, I might, if I had time, name all the Nations that are recorded in Hiſtory. But that doth not need, ſince we have one Nation which God hath ſet up for an Example to all the reſt. The *Jewiſh* Nation. In that one, I might ſhew many Inſtances of this Doctrine: But theſe Three are more remarkable than the reſt.

Firſt, When God had ſworn in the Wilderneſs, That he would cut off all the Men of that Generation, yet he did it not preſently: he gave them a time of Forty Years, and ſo long many of them lived before they came to periſh in the Wilderneſs.

Afterwards, when they were threatned with the *Babylonian* Captivity, which was in the beginning of *Jeremiah*'s Prophecy, in the Thirteenth Year of King *Joſias*; yet after that, it was Forty Years before they were carried into Captivity.

Laſtly, When *John Baptiſt* preached Repentance, and warned them to *fly from the wrath to come*, and told

told them, *now the Ax is laid to the root of the Tree*, now they were to ſtand or fall by their dealing with *Chriſt* at his coming. If they ſhould reject him, it was determined that God would deſtroy their Church, and ſcatter their Nation. They did commit that great Sin, and yet it was again Forty years before the Sentence was put in execution.

Theſe are ſufficient Proofs to ſhew that God is not in haſte to execute his Judgment upon Nations. But to go higher yet, we ſee the ſame in his Proceedings againſt the World of Mankind. We ſee in the Old World before the Flood, when *all fleſh had corrupted its way*, when they were fully ripe for deſtruction; yet then the deſtruction came not till after an hundred and twenty years warning, which (being to all Mankind) was as much as thoſe three warnings of the Jews put together. So ſlow is God to execute Judgment upon Sinners, eſpecially ſuch Judgments as are to end in their utter deſtruction.

So that now the matter of Fact being clear, we are to find a Reaſon for it: And here are two Reaſons in my Text; here is the Scoffers Reaſon, that ſays it is ſlackneſs in God; here is the Apoſtles Reaſon, that ſays No, 'tis indeed his Patience and Long-ſuffering.

The Firſt is the Scoffers Reaſon, that which ſome would perſwade themſelves to believe; they ſay

ſay Judgment is delayed, becauſe God is ſlack in puniſhing of Sinners; this the Apoſtle denies, as a reaſon moſt unworthy of God.

For, that is properly Slackneſs, when Offenders are not puniſh'd ſo much, or not ſo ſoon, as would be neceſſary for the Ends of Government. What are thoſe? to keep up Order, and Purity, and Peace, by the Exemplary puniſhing of Tranſgreſſors. Theſe are the great Ends for which Judgment is deſign'd; and to make delay of Judgment, ſo as to defeat theſe ends, or any of them, this is truly a ſlackneſs in Government.

Now ſuch a ſlackneſs as this cannot be thought to be in God. For this ſlackneſs muſt proceed from ſome defect or other; either want of Knowledg, or of Will, or of Power to do Juſtice. Such defects as theſe we may ſuppoſe to be in Man. But every one of theſe is either a fault, or an Imperfection; and that is enough to remove them from God, there can be no fault nor no Imperfection in him.

How then ſhall we ſolve the difficulty that appears to us in the Text? For that God doth things as if he were ſlack, 'tis plain, and the Apoſtle confeſſeth it: and yet *the Lord is not ſlack*, ſaith the Apoſtle: how then? *he is Long-ſuffering*: I, that's a Reaſon worthy of God; we ſhould have gueſs'd at it if he had not told us, for it is moſt agreeable to the nature of God. He

He is ſuch a great and generous Being, as having all things in his power, can do his own Work when he pleaſes: and he knoweth it, and therefore he will take his own time to do Judgment.

He will do things never the ſooner, nor later, whatever we think of it, for any provocation whatſoever. Nay, properly ſpeaking, to provoke him is impoſſible, he is ſo infinitely above us. He is not capable of Anger or Paſſion; nor can he fear that any Offender ſhould eſcape the Eye of his Knowledge, or the Arm of his Juſtice.

He can find us, and he can reach us, where ever we are. So that he hath nothing to haſten him, nothing to limit or preſcribe him. He may take his own time to do Juſtice, and he will do it, when it ſeems beſt to his Infinite Wiſdom: but that muſt be, when it is beſt to ſet forth the Glory of his Juſtice, or of his Mercy. His Juſtice and his Mercy, both theſe are chiefly ſet forth by his great Forbearance and Long-ſuffering.

Firſt, The Glory of his Juſtiee is ſet forth by this way of Proceeding. The Juſtice of God is the ſame in all Acts of his Government. But it eſpecially appears in his Judgments, that are viſibly executed: And in them it is moſt highly exalted by his Long-ſuffering.

When God hath long forborn to puniſh a Sinner, notwithſtanding the greatneſs and notorioufneſs of his Sins; and at laſt (as it will happen at ſome time

or other) God takes him in hand, and deals with him as he deſerves; the Long-ſuffering of God, before he comes to this, is that which moſt redounds to his Glory.

It lets all Men ſee, that there was a juſt Cauſe of Puniſhment: that there was ſo continued a Cauſe, that the Offender would not be treated otherwiſe: that he was not only ſet upon Evil, but that he could not be brought to any Good: that he was paſt all enduring; not only wicked, but incorrigible. It will at laſt make even the Offender himſelf, either confeſs his Fault, or ſay nothing; for he cannot excuſe it, he cannot but acknowledge the righteous Judgment of God.

This is the Advantage that any Court of Judicature has by not giving Sentence in a Cauſe till the Cauſe is ripe for it. Before that, being judg'd as it were while it was green, it would not do ſo well, the Juſtice of it would not appear: many things would have been kept from coming out, by precipitate judging. But when things are thoroughly examin'd, and when the matter is all out, when the Bottom of every thing appears, then the Sentence comes in its Seaſon; then every one ſays, Now it is as it ſhould be. Even the Offender himſelf agrees to it: he ſtands convict, not only to the Court, but to himſelf. Then the Judge hath an univerſal Confeſſion of his Juſtice: when none can ſay, he was not juſt in judging ſo, nay,

nay, when 'tis evident, he had been unjuſt in judging otherwiſe.

This a wiſe Heathen Writer, *Plutarch*, obſerves, is an Effect of the Long-ſuffering of God. *Dion* (ſaith he) that baſely killed his Friend, if for that he had been cut off preſently, would not have died ſo well, as he did a long while after: when another Friend kill'd him with the ſame Dagger, then every one ſaid, there is a God that avenges ſuch things,

Adonibezek, *Jud.* 1. 7. having treated ſo many of the petty Princes about him with that barbarous Inſolence, of cutting off their Thumbs and great Toes; at laſt, when his own Thumbs and Toes came to be cut off in like manner, then he could not but acknowledg Gods Juſtice: *As I have done*, (ſaith he) *ſo God hath requited me.*

It were eaſie to abound in ſuch Examples of Perſons, that have been by the patience and long-ſuffering of God (to uſe the Apoſtles word) *fitted for deſtruction*; and then it hath juſtly come upon them, to the great ſatisfaction of all Men, and to the greater Glory of God.

But of Perſons, whoever reads Hiſtory will meet with enough of theſe Inſtances; and whoever takes notice, will daily add to them by his own Obſervation. Perhaps every one may not obſerve it in National Judgments, (I mean final Judgments) for they happen not in every Age: and therefore I ſhall

name ſome few of the moſt remarkable of them, and deliver you the Senſe of Men that were then living, to ſhew you what they thought that ſuffer'd under thoſe Judgments of God.

They confeſt upon abundant Conviction, the great Patience and Long-ſuffering of God, before he brought things to the extremity: and they confeſs'd the Wickedneſs of their Nations, that run on in known Sins, till they even forc't God to theſe Extremities. Theſe things being conſidered together, have tended much to the magnifying of his Glory; and it has been acknowledged by them that writ whole Books to this purpoſe.

So namely for the *Jews*; in their firſt Captivity, it was ſeen and confeſt by *Jeremy* in his *Lamentations*: in their ſecond Captivity, by *Joſephus*, in his laſt Book of the *Jewiſh* Wars.

For the *Roman* Empire, which conſiſted of many Provinces, when all thoſe were given up to the barbarous Nations, the juſt Judgment of God in it was acknowledged, by *Jerom*, by *Auſtin*, by *Salvian*, and divers others, in thoſe Books which they wrote of God's Judgments on their ſeveral Nations.

Here particularly in this Iſland, when the *Britains* were over-run with the *Saxons*, *Gildas* gives God the Glory of it, in his Book of the Ruin of *Britain*. Likewiſe when thoſe *Saxons* were over-run by the *Danes*, the crying Sins, that even forc't that Vengeance from

from God, were acknowledged and bewail'd by *Lupus* in his Book of *Saxon* Homilies.

And laſtly (to name no more) when *Conſtantinople* was taken by the *Turks*, both *Franzes*, and others that bewail'd the Calamity, aſcrib'd it to the deſperate Folly of their People, who, between a ſordid and a ſeditious Humour, refus'd to ſerve their Prince either with their Purſes or in their Perſons. He had but a few hired Men to fight for him and his Kingdom. Yet they were more than he was able to pay. So that having quite exhauſted himſelf, having coin'd out his Altar-Plate, and at laſt gone from Houſe to Houſe to beg Money, when his Soldiers mutinied for want of it; he was feign to venture his own Perſon againſt the Enemy. And ſo when he fell, (as he did) under the Feet of the Enemy, when over his Body the *Turks* entred the City, they were amazed at the incredible Wealth they found in it; they had ſuch a Spoil, that it grew a Proverb among them, if any grew rich on a ſudden, they us'd to ſay, he had been at the Sacking of *Conſtantinople*.

It was ſo ſottiſh a thing, for a People to loſe themſelves for want of Money, when their Wealth was at the higheſt; as if they feared not to periſh, but to be a leſs Prey to their Enemy: It was ſuch an Infatuation from God, that they that knew how vile a People they were, could not but applaud the Divine Juſtice in it; they could not but acknowledge, it was the juſt Reward of their Sins.

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In all the Caſes before us, if theſe Nations had periſhed ſooner, or otherwiſe, God had loſt ſo much of the Glory of his Juſtice. It had not been ſo Illuſtrated, as it was by his great Patience and Long-ſuffering.

But Secondly, beſide the Glory of his Juſtice, God ſhews forth his Mercy in it likewiſe. There is ſome kind of Mercy in it whenever he puniſhes: *in his Judgment he remembers Mercy* (ſaith the Prophet.) 'Tis a Riddle to us now, but hereafter we ſhall ſee it: God never cuts off a Sinner betimes, but even in that Judgment there is Mercy, though we ſee it not in this World. But God ſhews forth his Mercy in this World in Long-ſuffering, in forbearing of Sinners.

He ſhews his Mercy all the while he forbeareth. When it is ſo long before he ſtrikes, he ſhews how unwilling he is to ſtrike at all. He would not do it if Men would take any warning. He looks upon us as his own Creatures, Creatures that cannot live without him, no not one Minute of our Lives. Good God! do we ſay he forbears us? He not only lets us live, but he keeps us, he maintains us all the while in our Being. All the while he waits to be friends with us, he would not have us dye in his diſpleaſure: Every bit that we eat, every wink that we ſleep, every thing we take to do us good, all are Witneſſes on his ſide; all do as it were atteſt to the Sincerity

Sincerity of his Proteſtations, *As I live* (ſaith the Lord) *I will not the death of a Sinner, Why will you dye? Yet turn your ſelves and live.*

Without turning from Sin there is no Living to God: we muſt dye, that is, we muſt periſh: Salvation it ſelf cannot ſave us. The Law ſaith with great ſtrictneſs, *the ſoul that ſinneth it ſhall dye.* The Goſpel hath but one way to relieve him, that is by *Repentance unto life.* It is that which *Chriſt came* for, *to call Sinners to Repentance*: It was that which he Preached, *Repent ye and believe the Goſpel*: It was that for which he died, that God might forgive us upon our Repentance.

This being therefore ſo indiſpenſably neceſſary, the Apoſtle thought fit to expreſs it in my Text, as the Condition on which we are to be ſaved, and no otherwiſe. This is it which I am next to ſhew, as to our Repentance, in what manner we are helpt and aſſiſted by the Long-ſuffering of God.

'Tis firſt the moſt likely way to bring Men to Repentance.

Secondly, in Fact, it is that which oftentimes has prevail'd.

Thirdly 'tis the laſt the only way it can be done: When this is gone, all is gone; there is no hope for them that have out-ſinned the Patience and Long-ſuffering of God.

First, it is a Rational way, the most likely to bring us to Repentance; because it giveth us divers things which are necessary for it; that is, First time to repent, and Secondly strong Motives to it, and Thirdly warnings to mind us of it. These are things which we could not have otherwise.

First, The Long-suffering of God gives us Time to repent: And time is needful to be had for any business, especially for a business of moment or difficulty, such as this is, to reclaim us from our Sins. It requires much time to do it well and effectually. And therefore not knowing how much there is to come of our Life, we were best resolve upon it, and set about it immediately; but yet, when that is done, we are but entred into a State of Repentance.

Repentance is the change of our Mind and course of Life, in every thing that is amiss, from Sin to the Obedience of God. It will require time to know our own ways, to know what God would have us do, and how to do it. It will therefore require cool Blood and calm Thoughts: Perhaps that is more then heat of youth will afford. It is a business that is to be done in retirement: And it is not presently that one can bring himself to it, that one can disentangle himself from his Companions in Sin. It is a business that requires much attention and practice, to break himself of those Habits that have got the Power over him. It requires so much

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the longer time to break our ſelves of them, by how much the longer we have continued in the Cuſtom of our Sins.

If God ſhould not afford us all the time that is neceſſary, it were but Juſtice, upon them that would not afford Time for God. But when he doth give us Time, 'tis his infinite Mercy: and however we employ it, we owe this to the Long-ſuffering of God.

But ſecondly, Having Time to repent, that we may employ our Time aright, this Patience of God gives us great Motives to Repentance: eſpecially this, It makes us ſee that God is willing to ſave us; he is yet willing, after ſo many and ſo great Provocations. What can work upon us, if we are not wrought upon by this?

A juſt God, and moſt juſtly provokt, that might have caſt us off long ſince, as we did him: (And if he had caſt us off, who had loſt by it? Alas! what can we add to him?) that he ſhould wait, as it were, for leave to ſhew us Mercy; while we, either eaſily forget, or wilfully kick againſt him: Yet that ſtill he calls, and waits for us, giveth us Time and Opportunity to repent: the very ſenſe of his Goodneſs, and the ſhame of our Ingratitude for it; theſe Thoughts chafed together will work much upon any ingenuous Soul.

But then farther, the hope that his Long-ſuffering giveth us, that God hath not yet done with us; he

hath not quite caſt us off; and the fear what may happen, if he ſhould, as well he may, if we hold out longer: Then, how ill it would go with us, how much the worſe for his Long-ſuffering hitherto. Theſe, and ſundry Thoughts more that his Long-ſuffering yields us, are the likelieſt Motives to Repentance.

And thirdly, It giveth us warning beſides, in ſundry things that happen in the mean while: Warnings on the one hand, by the Converſion of others; Warning on the other hand, by Gods Judgments on the Impenitent; Warning by divers things that happen to our ſelves, and in our Families.

All theſe are Calls to us from God, who ſpeaks, not only by his Word, but by his Providence: It is as it were a Voice from Heaven that ſpeaketh to us, *Why will you die? Turn you, yet, turn you and live.*

But we are eſpecially to obſerve thoſe National Warnings that happen before his Wrath breaks out to extremity. Perſons may be taken away without any warning: and if there ſeem to be any hardſhip in that, God may (and no doubt will) conſider them for it in the future Life. But for Nations, that have no future Life, I dare ſay that none were ever cut off without Warning: they have had Calls enough to bid them take heed, before they run themſelves into deſtruction.

Such Warnings were thoſe to the *Jews*, firſt, by the Death of good *Joſiah*, and then *Jeconiah*'s Captivity, before the general Captivity of King *Zedekiah* and

all

all his People. Such were thoſe they had again, in the taking of *Jeruſalem*, firſt by *Pompey*, then by *Soſius*, before it was deſtroyed by *Veſpaſian*.

So the *Britains* in this Iſland had been over-run once or twice, and recovered, before they were driven out of their Country. So the *Saxons* being invaded by the *Danes*, had driven them out once or twice, and had an Interval of Peace, before they came to be a Conquered People. So in that Inſtance of *Conſtantinople*, that People were ſufficiently warned by two Invaſions that the *Turks* made upon them, before that which ended in their Captivity.

On theſe, and all other Inſtances of this kind, I have only this to obſerve, (it is in ſome of thoſe Writers before-mentioned) That when their Nations ſaw themſelves gone, when they were gone paſt recovery, when they ſaw things come to extremity, when they found themſelves as it were in the Talons of their Enemies: then they could reflect upon what paſs't before; then they knew that heretofore they had Warnings; they remembred they had ſuch and ſuch Warnings from God: then they called themſelves Mad men, that would not take warning when it was given them. O that God would truſt them once more! with their Country, and with their Eſtate, and their Liberty! Then, how wiſe, and how good they would be! But that was never to be tried: it is too late, when things are gone paſt all Remedy.

The only way to escape that, is by Timely Repentance. If ever any Warning doth good, it is by bringing us to timely Repentance: and whoever are preserved by that means, they know to whom to ascribe it, it proceeds from the Long-suffering of God.

Secondly, As it is the likeliest way to reclaim us, so it is the way that has often obtein'd. Many, that have had Time, and Motives, and Warnings, (as I shewed you we have by the Long-suffering of God) have been wrought upon by them, and have repented of their Sins, and so escap't the Judgment to come. This, being matter of Fact, is to be proved only by Instances: and of them it were easie to shew a great number, I shall chuse only two or three out of Scripture.

The first shall be that of *Manasses* King of *Judah*, whose horrible Sins defil'd *Jerusalem* from one end to the other: and they are said to be his Sins for which God past that Sentence upon that People. In that sinful Course he had spent Thirty years of his long Reign, (which was in all Fifty five years.) Had God cut him off sooner, (as justly he might) then he had undoubtedly perisht in his Sins. But it was the Long-suffering of God that spared him. He was only chastised with a short hard Captivity, he took warning from that, he changed his Course, he turn'd a great Penitent: The People did the like by his Authority and Example, which made some amends for the Hurt

Hurt he had formerly given them: he that brought that Sentence upon them by his Sins, obtein'd a Reprieve for them by his Repentance.

Another, and that indeed an unuſual Inſtance, we have in *Nebuchadnezzar* King of *Babel*. Being a Heathen, from him nothing could be expected, but the Duties of Natural Religion. But he was ſo far from living up to that, that he walkt by no Rule but his Luſt, for Thirty ſix years of his Reign. When after he had ſo long led the Life of a Beaſt, God made him like one in all things but his Shape, for an extraordinary Inſtance of his Juſtice; then, being ſufficiently humbled, he was *reſtored* to his former way of Living, and *to the glory of his kingdom*; then *excellent Majeſty was* added to him; then he was freed from all Beſtiality, he became an excellent Man, a great Prophet, as the Heathen *Beroſus* tells us: for which wonderful Change, (as himſelf ſaith) *I prais'd, and extoll'd, and honour'd the great King of Heaven.*

But one Example more, that is of St. *Paul*, who declares it of himſelf, I. *Tim.* I. 13. I was a Reviler of *Chriſt*, a Perſecutor of the Chriſtian Religion, and inſolently ſpiteful againſt it. How long he was ſo, he doth not tell us: but it ſeems not to have been a very ſhort time, by that which follows, that he aſcribes his Converſion to the Long-ſuffering of God. And he did hope his Caſe would not be ſingular. He hoped many would follow his Example. He declared God

God had call'd him for that purpoſe, *v.* 16. where having ſaid, Thus and thus I was formerly; he adds, *Nevertheleſs I obtained Mercy, that in me firſt* Jeſus Chriſt *might ſhew forth all Long-ſuffering, for a pattern to all them that ſhall hereafter believe on him to life everlaſting.*

Theſe Examples may ſuffice. I could name many more, to ſhew how well God's Long-ſuffering is deſign'd, by the good it hath actually done, in reclaiming many Sinners, who without it muſt have periſht in their Sins.

I ſhall add but one thing more, That it is the Laſt Means that God uſes to bring us to Repentance. When he hath firſt given Time and Opportunity for it; when he hath withal given ſufficient Motives, and Means; when he hath warned us whither we are going; when he hath done as much for us, as hath brought others to Repentance; then, after that, his Long-ſuffering is only to give us time to think deliberately upon it. What one did not conſider as it came, he may poſſibly reflect upon afterwards: either of his own proper Inſtinct, or by the Admonition of others, or upon ſome occaſion that may riſe; eſpecially in Sickneſs, or ſome other Affliction, (if God be ſo gracious to ſend it upon him) and this is the Utmoſt that God intends by it. When a Foot, or a Finger, or any ſuch Part, hath a Gangren upon it; if the laſt Means that can be us'd, work no Cure, then the Limb muſt go off. But firſt it is to be numm'd, and

and ſo to be prepared for the Operation. That is all the remaining uſe of God's Patience to an incorrigible Sinner. It blinds and hardens him more and more, and ſo prepares him for everlaſting Damnation. That is terrible indeed, and that comes on every Moment. *Damnation ſlumbers not*, (ſaith the Apoſtle) though they do. They do not think whither they are going, but they go never the ſlower for that.

Or if they ſhould, their Judgment would be the more furious when it comes. Long-ſlighted Patience turns into Fury: and the longer it has been abuſed, the greater the Fury: and eſpecially the Patience of God: *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of* an incenſed *God*; for *our God*, provok't to extremity, *is a conſuming Fire.*

Having ſaid ſo much in the Explication of my Text, I dare not be ſo long in applying it as I would: and yet ſomething muſt be ſaid with reſpect to the Buſineſs of the Day; to humble our ſelves before God, for our Sins, and for the Sins of our Nation.

The Fountain of all our National Sins is the low Eſteem that we commonly have of our Religion. This indeed is a thing to be complain'd of generally among us: and it is much the worſe, for this Aggravation, that it is joyn'd with great Unthankfulneſs to God.

God hath dealt moſt bountifully with us, above other Nations, in many reſpects; but moſt of all in that

that which is the Crown of all his Bleſſings and Mercies. We have the beſt Religion in the World; the Chriſtian Religion (I know what I ſay) in the greateſt perfection and purity, that ever was in any National Church. And yet we are ſo far ſhort of other Chriſtians in the Value they have for their Religion, we ſo much undervalue ours, that for this, not only other Chriſtians, but even Heathens ſhall riſe up in Judgment againſt us. It ſhews we have low Apprehenſions of God. We neither love him, nor fear him, as we ought to do. If we did, how were it poſſible that ſo many among us ſhould have ſo little or no regard to thoſe Perſons or Things that are dedicated to God, and that are hallowed to his Name? 'Tis too viſible, that this is the Diſeaſe of our Church; the Mother-Diſeaſe from which all her other Ailings proceed.

From hence it proceeds, that ſome, ſeeing more Reverence for God, and for the Things of Religion, in Popery, have been drawn off to that groſs Corruption of the Chriſtian Religion. And in this they have been wonderfully confirmed, by ſeeing others take offence at ſome Things, which were certainly in the Primitive Church, and which muſt be in all Churches that will keep up Order and Decency. Some of theſe, by a fatal Miſtake, calling our Church-Government, and all our Forms and Ceremonies, Popery; and hunting out for a purer Way of Worſhip, (as they call it;) have run

run out firſt into Schiſm, and from thence not a few into damnable Hereſies: and branding every thing that they diſlike, with the Name of *Popery* and *Anti-chriſtianiſm*, they have not only divided and weakned our Church, but they have added wonderfully to the Strength and Credit of Popery.

From theſe Sects and Diviſions have proceeded, in the firſt place, Diſobedience and Rebellion againſt the Civil Government. I ſpeak plainly of that Rebellion that robb'd us of the beſt Chriſtian King that ever was. From thence we are to date the beginning of theſe following Evils; from thence the weakning and deſtruction of Church-Diſcipline; from thence the neglect of Catechiſm and Confirmation; from thence a contempt or low eſteem of the Sacraments of Chriſt's own Inſtitution; from thence the general neglect of Family-duties, eſpecially in the Education of Children and young People; from thence a general Corruption of Manners into Looſneſs and Licentiouſneſs and Debauchery. And in them that kept up a Senſe of Religion, much of it has run out into Diſputes, which led People to hate one another; and occaſion'd many among us, ſeeing ſo many things diſputed in Religion, to think that all Religion is diſputable; and ſo by degrees they were drawn into Irreligion and Atheiſm.

Whoever will be pleaſed to look Fifty years back, and give himſelf the trouble to think, what many of

us have ſeen, and all others may inform themſelves; he cannot but know, that this which you have heard, hath been the true Courſe and Progreſs of our National Sin. He will ſee, for a great part of that time, ſuch a Body of a Nation as the Prophet *Eſay* deſcribes, i. 6. *from the ſole of the foot to the head without any ſoundneſs in it.* To any one that feared God, it was a ſad Proſpect from thence, to the four and twentieth *Verſe* of that *Chapter*; where God declares againſt his own People, *Ah! I will eaſe me of my adverſaries, I will avenge me of mine enemies.* Yet he did not execute that Sentence preſently, but within an Age or two his *wrath came upon them to the uttermoſt.*

Now who could tell all this while, but God might have pronounced the like Sentence againſt us, and that it might have been executed in like manner? God knows what it may come to in time. But hitherto it has been forborn, I know not why. No Man can tell why it hath been forborn all this while. But God tells us in my Text, and elſewhere, that it is upon the account of his Long-ſuffering. God hath been indeed, he hath ſhewn himſelf, *long-ſuffering to us-ward.* And why is that? The *Apoſtle* tells us, *becauſe he would have no man periſh, but that all ſhould come to him by Repentance.*

Now to ſhew that God would have us come to Repentance; that as he hath made us a Reform'd Church, ſo he would have us a Reform'd People, a Pattern

Pattern to all other Nations for his Glory; that this is God's Deſign by his Patience hitherto, is as plain in the Courſe of his Providence, as if he had declar'd it to us by a Voice from Heaven. What can be plainer than this, that he hath puniſht us as a People whom he had no mind to deſtroy? It is plainer yet, by the Deliverances he hath given us: having not only ſaved us from the brink of Deſtruction, but put it withal in our power to be the happieſt People under Heaven. In all the Hiſtory I have read, I dare challenge any Man to ſhew where one Nation hath ever had two ſuch Deliverances, as have hapned to ours, in one Age.

Firſt, for our Deliverance at the King's Reſtauration; what a Turn it was to this Nation? out of a moſt diſtracted Condition (in which we were ready to cut one anothers Throats) within a few Months to be a moſt flouriſhing Kingdom? How truly was it applied to that Change, what the *Pſalmiſt* ſays, *Pſ.* cxxvi. 1. *When the Lord turned the Captivity of Sion, then were we like unto them that dream?* We did not know whether we were awake or aſleep. We could ſcarce believe what we ſaw at the King's Reſtauration.

But for the uſe of that ſingular Bleſſing; as to that, we were truly like them that dream: for no People that had been awake, would have loſt ſuch an Opportunity as that was, to have made themſelves happy

to all Generations. But alas! inſtead of that, inſtead of growing wiſer and better, we grew worſe with Proſperity. The People grew drunk and diſſolute upon it. The Court was that and worſe, they were intoxicated with Popery: In favour to which, it was found neceſſary to promote Atheiſm and Infidelity among the Nobility and Gentry; and for them that had a Senſe of Religion, to divide them, and to exaſperate them one againſt another.

By theſe and the like means, we not only loſt the Fruit of that former Deliverance, but we were brought into a Danger as great, nay, greater than the former. For then, whatever we ſuffered, or feared, yet ſtill we were not out of Hope. But there was no hope, if Popery had once prevail'd; there had been no more hope left for us, than for men in the Inquiſition.

And how near was that danger of Popery? how impoſſible was it for us to eſcape? Nothing could have ſaved us from it, but Miracle. It was a Miracle of Providence that delivered us from it.

I ſhall not repeat what I have lately ſaid here on that Subject: But this I ſhall ſay, which ſhews God's Deſign in it. It is a Providence, that hath not only brought us in Hope, but hath put us in actual Poſſeſſion, and hath given us Security for the continuance, as well of our Liberties as of our Religion. God hath put it again in our power by this

this Deliverance to be as happy a People as any is under Heaven.

Now he trys us a ſecond time, whether we will walk worthy of his Mercy and Goodneſs. He ſheweth us, the end of his Long-ſuffering is that we may not periſh. But if we will, there is no Remedy. Now who would think, that God ſhould put this to us, Twice, as you ſee he hath done, in one Generation? It is not to be hoped that he will deal thus with us a third time. And now, if you will take him at his Word, (ſo I call it, for his Providence is a Call to you from Heaven; 'tis as if he had ſaid, *Why will you die? Turn ye now and live.*) *To day, if ye will hear his voice, Oh harden not your hearts. To day*, do what you can, at this preſent. You can Now take a firm Reſolution, to comply with this Providence of God; to do your part, as he hath done his, to make this a holy and a happy Nation: firſt holy, and then happy; it can be no otherwiſe.

To effect that, firſt begin with your ſelves: and then engage others, as far as you can, to break off that Courſe and Progreſs of Sin that you have heard.

To begin where I ended. Firſt, To take God's part againſt all Irreligion and Atheiſm; againſt them that queſtion his Being, or his Word, or his Government. He is the Enemy of God that doth this: he is not his Friend that can endure it to be done.

Next,

Next, to purge the Nation of all Immorality: and especially, of those scandalous Sins of Cursing, and Swearing, and Profaning the Lord's Day, of Drunkenness, and Whoredom, and all the like Abominations. These things defile the Land: they must be purged forth; or else God will not dwell in it, he will not own us for his People. Now herein, blessed be God that hath put it in His Majesty's heart to begin that Work, which I trust he will perfect in due time. He hath given that Order, which, if it be followed, will make a Reformation among us, unless we are much wanting to our selves. They are neither good Christians, nor good Subjects, that will not follow so good and so great an Example.

Then, it will be also necessary for us, to lay all uncharitable and unpeaceable Disputes and Animosities among Christians. However they may differ from one another in Opinion, yet let them joyn together so far as they are agreed: in things that are manifestly for the Glory of God, and the Common good of Mankind; and especially of that Society wherein they live. In such things we should first learn to Unite, and then we may hope that God in his good time may compose all our other Divisions.

Particularly for them that are in the Communion of our Church, let them shew that they are not only of our Party, but of our Religion. Otherwise they may help to save the Church, but for all that they will perish themselves. If

If they are ſerious in Religion, they will ſhew it by their Attendance on God's Worſhip and Sacraments. They will endeavour to be as conſtant and devout, as they would be if they ſaw him there, who, we know, is preſent with us at thoſe Meetings. They will ſhew it likewiſe by obſerving their Duties to Men for God's ſake. Firſt in Loyalty to Their Majeſties, with all that Concernment that we owe Them, as the Inſtruments of our Deliverance: then in Obedience to Laws, which we cannot but value the more, as being ſenſible of our late Danger of an Arbitrary Government. They will ſhew it likewiſe, in being good Chriſtians, as well as good Subjects: and that in all Points that belong to Men of their Rank and Condition; in good Government of their Families, in good Education of their Children, in good Examples to all their Neighbours; in Love to their Brethren, in Charity to all Men, in univerſal Purity of Life.

Oh! if we could all attain to this! if any number of us could do it! I will not ſay the whole Nation, but if a conſiderable part of it! What Favours might we not hope, the whole Nation would have for their ſakes? For the ſake of Ten righteous Perſons, we know, God would have ſpared ſuch a People as *Sodom*. A Kingdom ſo much greater than *Sodom*, as ours is, muſt require a proportionable Number. A People ſo much more knowing as ours is, will

will require a yet much greater Proportion. But yet, why may not God find ſo much a greater Number among us? I truſt he hath done it, elſe he would not have ſpared us ſo long; elſe we had long ere this, been as *Sodom*, and made like to *Gomorrah*. I truſt God will ſtill find ſuch a Number, and that he will ſpare the reſt for their ſakes.

If there be any hope, it muſt be from them that ſerve him, as you do in this Place. I beſeech you go on to do it; and for fear God ſhould not ſtill find his Number, be careful to keep it up, for your own, and for your Childrens ſakes.

Hold faſt the Profeſſion of your Faith without wavering. Get in what Company you can into the Number. Exhort all others to join with you, in ſerving God. *Provoke one another* (in the *Apoſtle*'s ſenſe,) not to hatred and ſtrife, but *to love and good works*. Let there be no Emulation but this, who ſhall be the beſt toward God, the moſt knowing and exemplary Chriſtians: and *forſake not the* Publick *Aſſemblies*, as ſome do, who I hope in time will be wiſer; but *exhort one another, and ſo much the more, as you ſee the day approaching*: for *yet a little while, and he that ſhall come will come, and will not tarry*; and *his reward is with him, to render to every man according to his works.*

FINIS.

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